

**Public**

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Gentlemen

***Tripartite Committee (Ref. Civil Society)***

Economic Committee for Latin America and

The Caribbean (ECLAC)

Washington, D.C.

United States of America

Dear Sirs:

With respect to the invitation issued to the Civil Society by the Chairman of the Committee of Governmental Representatives on the participation of the Civil Society, the Chamber of Commerce, Industries and Agriculture of Panama, on behalf of the Business Sector of the Republic of Panama, is pleased to submit, attached hereto, the document that contains the POSITION of our Institution on the process of negotiation of the Free Trade Area of the Americas.

For the preparation of said document, the San Jose Ministerial Declaration, the general objectives and objectives according to issue area have been used as a frame of reference, being adapted to the requirements established by the Tripartite Committee.

Hoping that our contribution constitutes a constructive element for the preparation of the study documentation of the Ministers, I take this opportunity to send you my best regards.

Sincerely,

Edgardo R. Carles

EDGARDO R. CARLES

Chairman

CHAMBER OF COMMERCE, INDUSTRIES  
AND AGRICULTURE OF PANAMA

**POSITION**

FREE TRADE AREA OF THE AMERICAS  
-1999-

The Chamber of Commerce, Industries and Agriculture of Panama, as important spokespersons for the business sector that our membership represents, enthusiastically supports the great challenge that the process of negotiating the Creation of the Free Trade Area of the Americas, initiated in September 1998, represents, in addition to the challenge that we as a country will have to face when assuming the Secretariat of the FTAA during the years 2001 to 2003, and our legitimate aspiration to obtaining the Permanent Secretariat of the FTAA at the conclusion of the negotiations.

The general trend in the Americas has been economic growth, the elimination of barriers to trade, improvement of productivity, an increase in the levels of competitiveness, an increase in opportunities and confidence in participation in the global market; therefore, with the intention of contributing to this process, that raises standards of living, improves labor conditions of all the peoples of the Americas and protects the environment, we wish to present to the Tripartite Committee some considerations about the issues subject to negotiation.

The present position is the result of work carried out by the Office of the Director of Economic Affairs, through its Foreign Trade Commission, based on the analysis and summary of various work documents from our archives and what has been done to date at the negotiating table.

For each of the items included in this document, the objectives, principles and priority issues are presented, in conformance with the recommendations established by the Tripartite Committee (Ref. Civil Society).

***PARTICIPATION OF THE CIVIL SOCIETY***

The process of transparency should characterize the negotiations for the creation of the Free Trade Area of the Americas. It will be generally recognized with the incorporation and participation of the Civil Society through its different types of representation. The business sector, which we represent, all productive groups of the society, labor, environmental, and academic groups, among others, make significant contributions to the negotiation process, which guarantee the constructive evolution of same.

The private sector has actively participated through the Business Forums that enabled shaping our positions on the negotiations. The nerve center for obtaining more benefits from these processes is the Private Company; therefore, it becomes necessary to expand participation in the decision-making.

The participation of the Civil Society represents the axis of the articulation of the decisions made in the negotiations; lack of participation in said process would affect its legitimacy in the view of the Business Community.

***GENERAL OBJECTIVES AND PRINCIPLES***

The decisions in the process of negotiations of the FTAA will be conducive to guaranteeing and assuring the transparency of same, making it congruent and consonant with the rules and disciplines of the WTO, in addition to enabling the incorporation of those improvements that may arise with respect to same. The business sector that we represent, as an element of Civil Society, reasserts this principle as the basis of the negotiations and supports decision-making by consensus.

The coexistence of the FTAA with bilateral and sub-regional agreements will guarantee the advances of the business community with respect to the processes of reconversion of productive systems achieved to date, assuring the full participation of said sectors in the FTAA.

We recognize the differences existing with respect to the small economies, and we support those measures aimed at facilitating the process of conversion and adaptation of same in a way that is simple, transparent and easy to apply, acknowledging the degree of heterogeneity of same.

### ***GENERAL OBJECTIVES***

We reaffirm the commitment to establish the Free Trade Area of the Americas no later than the year 2005, committing ourselves by concrete advances to progressively and systematically eliminate any element that may be considered a barrier to trade in goods and services and investment.

As a non-profit group representing the interests of the business community, we undertake to allocate our human and economic resources, insofar as possible, to participating through constructive input that contributes to expressing in the negotiation agreements the interests of the business sector that we represent.